

Early in 1976 Archbishop Thomas Winning of Glasgow published a statement reaffirming the views of the Bishops of Scotland. His statement was called **The Positive Value of Catholic Education**. Archbishop Winning's statement elicited a strong response, after W McKechnie Vice Chairman of Strathclyde's Education Committee took issue with the Bishop Brian Gill, an advocate, supported him. Both wrote in the Times Educational Supplement (Scotland). Father Anthony Ross, writing in **Question** also took issue with the Bishops statement. We reprint the essence of the various statements here with a preface by Colin MacLean. Editor of the TES(S):

Education in a sectarian society several views preface C. MacLean

To my mind, no debate of this century in Scottish education is more important than that about Roman catholic schools, for this debate embraces all the major questions about the power that Government does, could or should have in determining the character of education - its diversity, its discipline, its content, its style. No obstacle to all-inclusive, uniform comprehensivisation has been greater than that of the Roman Catholic schools. The RC Church is not the national church. There are strongly opposed views about separate RC schools among members of the RC community and also within the national established Church of Scotland (for some Protestants feel strongly that the RC schools should survive!) also the Labour Party is incapable of achieving even a semblance of unity on the subject. Personally I am glad that the RC schools provide so intractable a problem because they ensure continuing and potentially

productive tension over the issue of the right of choice for any religious or cultural group, for members of the teaching profession, for parents, and eventually (I hope) for pupils. Pupils of what age? - the question is at the heart of the most fundamental question in education.

'The Positive Value of Catholic Education' Archbishop Winning

Catholic education has the opportunity to be unique and the greater responsibility to be contemporary and open.

Unique, because it offers well defined religious truths and values as the basis for living and learning.

Contemporary, for it provides the young with Catholic insights into the many problems facing individuals and society today.

Open, for although it offers a Catholic outlook, it does not condemn other points of view, or take up positions against them - but aims at using acquired knowledge, skills and habits of mind and heart for effective Christian service to the whole community, teaching mutual understanding, respect of others, and genuine tolerance.

Catholic education aims at producing men and women capable of taking their place in society as educated adult Christians. Modern trends make this kind of education more necessary than ever. The Church is too experienced in education to be misled into thinking, like many education theorists today, that the teaching of a commitment to a specific religious faith is incompatible with academic freedom. Catholic education unashamedly aims at locating the message of Christ proclaimed by the Church at the very heart of the entire syllabus, curriculum and life of the school community.

Yet, the 1972 Report commissioned by the Secretary of State for Scotland on "Moral and Religious Education in Scottish (non-denominational) Schools" has this to say about the current aims of religious education.

"But religious education is no longer aimed at producing assent to any particular set of propositions or commitment to one particular faith . . ."

and again

"The teacher is not there to convince pupils of specific religious beliefs

(far less to make them learn them).” (cf. pp. 68-69).

Surely Catholic education has more to offer than this. The Catholic Church rejects this theory of religious education for it is based on a false concept of the very nature of the Church and the role of evangelisation which is the task of all committed Christians. Indeed, in the light of such a basic divergence all other acknowledged defects in our educational system, from shortage of teachers to cramped accommodation, are of secondary importance. The Christian child fits into a Christian philosophy. Real dialogue can only exist between people who have convictions, between people who know what they are and what they want. It is tragic to realise that genuine Christian education has been so compromised by modern secular theories upheld at times even by Christians.

Our idea of community has nothing in common with the ghetto mentality. Catholic education is not institutional protection. We would be failing the Church were we to regard Catholic education merely as an attempt to hold onto what we have. Individually and as a community we accept our responsibilities in society. But to be open to the world does not mean to conform to the world. It is one of the great advantages of an age in which unbelief speaks out that faith can speak out too; that if falsehood opposes truth, truth can oppose falsehood.

Some Catholic parents have their children educated at non-denominational schools despite the existence of a Catholic school in their locality. I doubt if any of these parents have any serious criticism of Catholic education in its theory or presentation, but in the light of what has been said above, are they fulfilling their duty to their children? Do they realise that they are depriving their children of the support of a Catholic school community, staff, pupils and chaplain? Are they putting social values before spiritual values?

The Catholic home is not a substitute for the Catholic school, nor is the Catholic school a substitute for the Catholic home. In such a complex society as ours the Catholic home needs the support of the Catholic school to ensure that knowledge and understanding of the faith grow apace with intellectual development. Similarly, the Catholic school requires the backing of good example from the Catholic home. Together they make a formidable team; apart, they leave gaps which can never be filled.

Every Catholic child has the right to a Catholic education and every Catholic parent has the duty to acknowledge that right. Indeed, each member of the Catholic community has some role to play, especially in those parts of the country where there are no Catholic schools. Here the contribution of parents, clergy and lay educators assumes even greater importance.

‘A Matter of Public Concern’

W.J.McKechin

The natural reaction of most people to Archbishop Winning’s recent statement on Roman Catholic schools made on behalf of all the RC bishops in Scotland and handed out at Catholic churches throughout the length and breadth of Scotland to each and every Catholic who attended mass, is that it deals with an internal matter that is the concern of Catholics only and none of their affair. However, it cannot be so readily dismissed, as Catholic schools are not solely the property and prerogative of Catholic Church. They are state schools, which as the law states “shall be held, maintained and managed by the education authorities as public schools”. They are thus a matter of public concern and cannot be exempted from debate.

It is no secret that Catholic schools have in recent times been coming under increasing criticism on various counts, mainly but not wholly from within the Catholic Church. There has been the growing difficulty of staffing them with Catholics, so that more and more they are having to be buttressed up by non-Catholic teachers; but even at that they are still the most chronically understaffed of schools. There is growing disquiet among parents about their performance. A much smaller proportion of pupils complete a full secondary course in RC secondaries than in non-denominational schools.

On the religious side, some Catholic parents have begun to question if Catholic schools are doing the job they are supposed to do, namely instruct Catholic children in their Catholic faith, and also on a much wider issue to question if in this ecumenical age separate Catholic schools, with their inbuilt inward approach and separateness, provide the most fitting way to instil or practise the Christian precept of brotherly love in the true Christian spirit of all men being brothers regardless of race, colour, class or creed.

The statement has thus primarily been made to counter an existing situation and this is evident by the defensive tone that resounds throughout the document. Although in the past ten years much has changed in both the religious and educational worlds, it is almost a repeat of the pastoral letter on Catholic schools, written by Bishop Thomson, the present RC bishop of Motherwell, and issued on behalf of the RC bishops of Scotland in November 1966, except for a few differences in detail and presentation. The substance is almost the same and except for a few changes in emphasis its argument is almost identical: the argument is obviously theological but developed in a way peculiar to clerics and appealing only to clerics.

It is unlikely to have any more impact than the previous pastoral letter, as it in no ways deals with or tries to answer the problems that beset many Catholic parents, anxious to be true to their religious beliefs, but equally anxious for the welfare and future of their offspring.

The whole statement exudes an air of unawareness of the nature and magnitude of the difficulties under which Catholic schools labour and of the

quality of education, both secular and religious which is provided in them, pointing to inadequate briefing. This might have been avoided if advice had not been sought in quarters which seem to be more concerned in purveying reassurance than in conveying unpalatable truths.

Many of these unpalatable truths are to be found in two well discussed publications which the Scottish Education Department have issued in the past few years, **Secondary Schools - Staffing Survey, 1970** and **Secondary School Staffing**, where statistics relating to the qualifications, age distribution and supply of Catholic teachers are revealed in all their melancholy inadequacy. Although clearly, if somewhat tersely presented, the implications of these statistics may not be immediately apprehended by those who are not professional educationists, but there must surely be sufficient of those amongst the Catholic community able to outline their full significance and consequences.

Only someone unaware of the true situation could as the statement does term the shortage of Catholic teachers in Catholic secondaries as temporary, when for nigh on 60 years, that is ever since Catholic schools came under the state umbrella in 1918, Catholic schools have never been able to operate without non-Catholic teachers.

There have always been some non-Catholic teachers on their staffs, but in the past few years the situation has worsened in that the percentage of non-Catholic teachers has continued to increase at a rate which shows no sign of abating and which, if it continues as at present, will in a few years ensure that most teachers in Catholic schools will be non-Catholics, a situation which will make it near impossible to claim a unique Catholic atmosphere for Catholic schools or to describe them as "communities sharing the same religious truths and moral values".

One also can only be grossly misinformed to maintain "we should not be discouraged or misled into thinking that academic standards in Catholic schools suffer in comparison with those in non-denominational schools". It is true that as public schools the standards set by education authorities are the same for both sets of schools, RC and non-denominational, but their attainment of these standards certainly differs as indicated by the fact that the percentage of pupils in Catholic Schools who attain three or more passes at Higher grade is little more than half the corresponding percentage in non-denominational schools.

In criticising the Millar report, it is difficult to know what meaning the statement assigns to the phrase "academic freedom" when it states: "The church is too experienced in education to be misled into thinking, like many education theorists today, that the teaching of a commitment to a specific religious faith is incompatible with academic freedom". It can scarcely be the normally accepted one where "academic freedom" means the freedom of an educational policy and devise its own curricula without being subject to any external pressure or interference: a meaning in no way limited to a religious context.

Nor in this respect is academic freedom the argument that educationists would advance. Rather they would argue that religious education is not concerned with commitment but with insight, that its

purpose is to unfold the relationship between religion and man in all aspects, historical, mystical, metaphysical, moral, ethical, psychological, ritualistic, so that the believer, regardless of his commitment can have a deeper appreciation of what he believes in. On the other hand to limit a person's religious education to a recital of the beliefs and practices of a particular religion is to abort the possibility of his or her religious development.

The statement hinges on its opening phrase: "Christ's mission is our mission, Christ's message is our message. And Catholic education is an essential expression of our mission", a statement which no committed Catholic would deny, even those who send their children to non-Catholic schools. What is at question is not Catholic education but Catholic schools, from which follows the corollary "are Catholic schools necessary for Catholic education?"

Throughout the statement education is confused with schools. But education existed long before schools and will continue to exist long after schools depart. So also will Catholic education. The Roman Catholic church has existed for almost two thousand years: compulsory universal schooling has only recently celebrated its centenary.

It is disturbing to think that a church with a tradition of transmitting its faith with undiminished fervour for centuries through generation after generation of illiterate peasants now claims it can only be done propped up by a school system subsisting on public funds, a claim all the more damning when one can see all around other churches, none of whose resources bear comparison, doing it successfully and unaided.

How did the Catholic Church manage in the nineteen centuries preceding universal schooling? How did it fulfil Christ's mission? Perhaps because it exercised a more energetic witness. Perhaps because then it really was what it now claims it is, a teaching church. The church is where commitment should begin, where it should be nurtured and where it should come to fruition. Commitment should not be hived off to a vehicle which is incapable of coping with it. Not only is it ruining the education of Catholics, but it is destroying the very fabric of their church.

'Faithful in spite of discouragement'

Brian Gill

My reaction to Archbishop Winning's statement on Roman Catholic education is one of enthusiasm. The statement or to be accurate the restatement, is timely, well expressed and positive in its emphasis. It's moderate but uncompromising tone is typical of its author whose impact on Scottish religious life has already been considerable and will I am sure, undoubtedly increase.

Notwithstanding Mr W. J. McKechin's hostility towards the statement (February 13), there are, I think, one or two matters on which I agree with him.

I readily agree that the existence of separate Catholic schools within the state system is a proper matter of public concern and public debate. Unlike Mr McKechin, I would be surprised to hear anyone argue the contrary.

Mr McKechin is well founded in what I take to be his impression that many Catholic parents are now questioning some of the assumptions of the hierarchy, and little wonder. They, unlike their pastors, have a direct personal interest. They have perfectly respectable social and economic aspirations for their children and, rightly or wrongly, they are doubtful whether the Catholic sector of the public education system can fulfil them.

Although they persevere in their support of the Catholic schools, there is much to discourage them. There is the complacent assumption by certain of their bishops that the Catholic representation on regional education committees should always be clergymen, a view which is all too typical of the clerical view of the laity in the Scottish Church.

Such parents are discouraged when dissenting Catholic clergymen publicly attack the idea of Catholic education without there being any public rebuttal from the hierarchy. They are discouraged by the craven reluctance of the clergy to engage in public controversy on the question of separate schools or to intervene on their behalf in specific local issues, such as staffing, affecting the religious welfare of their children. They are discouraged by the variable consistency with which individual prelates support the Catholic colleges of education.

They are discouraged by the inadequate representation of parents, and the extravagant representation of teachers, on the Catholic Education Commission, a body directly appointed by the hierarchy. They are discouraged, too, by the commission itself which is unimaginative in its ambitions, amateurish in its performance and hindered in much of its work by a leaden preoccupation with the narrow career concerns of the Catholic teaching profession.

Despite all of this, however, most Catholic parents persevere in their support of Catholic schools because they see in them the best possible avenue in the modern world towards the attainment of the highest ideals of Christian education. They are fortified in this view by authoritative evidence about the state of religious education in the non-denominational

schools. They see in their schools the only opportunity for an overtly Christian form of education, however imperfectly attained, because the non-denominational schools have long disclaimed such an ideal.

Christian education is not mere instruction in belief. At its best it is for teacher and pupil alike, a profound religious experience. To lead a young mind to the knowledge, understanding and love of God is no mean task. To participate in it is part of the sacred duty of Christian parenthood.

Such are the values of Christian education, and such are the values which Archbishop Winning's statement reasserts.

The problem which has characterised this debate over the years has certainly not been that of identifying the Catholic standpoint which, much to the indignation of its critics has remained constant and consistently expressed. Mr McKechin is absolutely right when he says of the statement that, when compared with the bishops' pastoral letter of 1966, "the substance is almost the same and except for a few changes in emphasis its argument is almost identical". I find it difficult to imagine what changes in the substance of the argument he would have preferred.

This, to my mind, is Mr McKechin's least profitable line of attack, because the presuppositions of the Catholic argument are such that its logic is unchanging.

To state the issue in this way leaves open, of course, all questions as to the practicability of implementing the Christian ideal within the Catholic school or the efficiency with which those schools are run. I would not deny that substantial criticisms, not necessarily those adopted by Mr McKechin, can be cogently advanced against the present system.

But the real issue is not faced in skirmishing over statistical data about staffing ratios and examination results. A much more fundamental proposition underlies Mr McKechin's argument, and that is that there ought not to be a group of schools kept separate on sectarian lines.

This is altogether a much worthier subject for debate, because it brings us to a consideration of the nature of education itself, of the place spirituality in the formation of the individual personality and of the rights and responsibilities of parent in the ethical and spiritual development of their children.

When the positive assertions of the Christian position on the issue are made, as in the statement, the alternatives must be examined and, since there are several, anyone seeking the abolition of the Catholic schools must disclose which alternative he supports, and, since he seeks to invert the status quo argue his justification of it.

These alternative solutions range from a candid support for the abolition of Christianity in public education to an idealistic but wholly naive belief that Christian reconciliation will flourish, despite the objective evidence of the Millar report, in a so-called integrated system, and at the other extreme to an acceptance of the vapid indifferentism that is the inevitable product of some ill-defined programme of non-committal religious studies.

Mr McKechin unhesitatingly adopts the latter solution, and it is in the glimpse of it which he permits us that the unsoundness of his position becomes clear. In his comment on the statement's reference to the Millar

report Mr McKechin reveals an alarming readiness to prefer the claims of the school over those of the home.

Citing with approval the arguments of some undefined body of educationists, he favours an educational order in which religious education is concerned not with commitment but with insight.

Such educationists, he says, "would argue that religious education is not concerned with commitment but with insight, that its purpose is to unfold the relationship between religion and man in all aspects, historical, mystical, metaphysical, moral, ethical, psychological, ritualistic, etc., so that the believer, regardless of his commitment, can have a deeper and more meaningful appreciation of what he believes in"; while on the other hand "to limit a person's religious education to a recital of the beliefs and practices of a particular religion is to abort the possibility of his or her religious development".

It is necessary to examine this line of argument in some detail because it would convince Mr McKechin and his supporters, whatever were the academic attainments of Catholic schools.

I dispute the assumption that commitment and insight are true alternatives. There is no reason why commitment to a clearly defined religious standpoint should necessarily deprive a child of insight into the general features of religion as a social phenomenon. I assert as a fact that that need not be and is not the effect of Catholic education. What evidence is there to the contrary?

I certainly dispute the assumption that Catholic education limits a child's religious education to a recital of the beliefs and practices of his religion. What evidence is there to support this assumption? And even if such a recital of beliefs and practices was the sum and substance of Catholic education (which is not the case) it by no means follows that the effect of it is to "abort" the possibility of the individual's religious development. Again, what evidence is there for such an assertion, and what does Mr McKechin mean by "religious development" in this argument?

Is it a maturing of a religious faith, in which case how can that be achieved in the young without instruction in the beliefs and practices of that religion?

Or does "religious development" contain, as I suspect, a further covert assumption, namely that it refers to a desired maturing out of any specific sectarian allegiance?

Anyone pretending to serious participation in this debate has to come clean about these assumptions, because they are by no means too obvious for argument, least of all when they are prefaced by such question-begging propositions as that "in this ecumenical age" separate Catholic schools have an "inbuilt inward approach to separateness".

Separateness from what? From Presbyterianism? Is that the predominant character of the non-denominational schools, and if it is, is separateness from it an impediment to ecumenism, particularly when the Protestant interpretation of ecumenism has consistently and understandably, emphasised its refusal to yield on fundamental beliefs?

Even in his assessment of the Catholic Church's mission, which he dismisses, with regrettable tastelessness, as that of "transmitting its faith ... through generation after generation of illiterate peasants", there is no respite from Mr McKechin's unfounded assumptions.

"The church" he says, "is where commitment should begin, where it should be matured and where it should come to fruition. Commitment should not be hived off to a vehicle which is incapable of coping with it". But here again Mr McKechin misapprehends the nature of Christian education, for the school, like the home is part of the living church. It is part of an integrated system. It is not a substitute for either the church or the home.

Despite these strictures I do not wholly discount the value of Mr McKechin's contribution on the subject. His expression of view together with the more strident hostility of the media, must surely convince the Catholic hierarchy of what they are up against. No one, so far as I am aware, has claimed that the abolition of the Catholic schools would mean the abolition of the Catholic Church in Scotland, but it would, in my view, gravely impair the church's mission.

If, therefore, it is the duty of the Catholic parent to support the separate system of Catholic schools (as the statement plainly asserts), such a parent is entitled to ask what the hierarchy propose to do to help him in the performance of his duty.

Are they prepared to join the controversy at a political rather than a theological level? Are they prepared if need be, to marshal the votes of their flock to save the schools?

If not, what practical steps do they seriously ask the parents to take? And, above all, what practical proposals do they have in the short term for the academic improvement of the Catholic schools?

'Should the Schools be Integrated?'

Anthony Ross

A considerable number of people share the hope that specifically Roman Catholic schools will cease to exist in Scotland before long. The Catholic bishops on the other hand have recently re-affirmed their determination to defend the present system with all the strength they can muster, and claim to have support in their stand from the majority of Catholic parents. If the majority of parents do feel as strongly as the bishops claim then the question of integrating "Catholic" schools and "Protestant" schools is politically too explosive to handle, given the present delicate political balance and the size of the Catholic vote in certain areas of Scotland.

It is of course often forgotten that support for the existing system comes not only from Catholics but also from staunch members of other social or religious groups. There are, for example, those who fear the emergence of a monolithic state educational system which would ignore parental rights and assist the growth of totalitarian bureaucracy. They see the system of Catholic schools as a major bulwark of democratic freedom. Then there are members of other denominations who believe that Catholics are right to insist on the religious aspect of education and who feel that the Church of Scotland in particular has failed to resist the spread of secularism, through weakness of faith by letting religious instruction decline almost to vanishing point in many, if not most, schools.

The Catholic community is not as united on the schools question as it may seem in official pronouncements on the pages of the Catholic press. I received evidence of this personally after advocating some years ago, on a television programme, an integrated school system at least at secondary school level. Nevertheless Catholics have reason to be at least wary when integration is discussed, for it is not as simple a matter as its advocates often seem to believe. Nor are they a single-minded group; their motives for wishing the disappearance of Catholic schools are indeed varied.

Some are in fact hostile to religious teaching of a doctrinal nature, whatever its source, and would eliminate it from schools altogether; or at most allow some form of comparative religious studies claiming to be objective, even scientific in character. Could the sort of teacher this supposes actually be found in sufficient numbers?

Others appear to see integration as the solution to the sort of sectarianism so tragically illustrated in extreme form in Northern Ireland. By concentrating on integration they can avoid for a time the historical, social and economic facts of a situation. But can integration work on a

general scale in somewhere like Northern Ireland unless there are already massive numbers of parents and teachers committed to making it work?

Some appear to be playing devious ecclesiastical politics as members of the established kirk when they advocate integration. They are really promoting a "take-over bid". This becomes evident in the embarrassment with which they meet the suggestion that in an integrated system a Roman Catholic might become headmaster of whatever distinguished school you care to mention. Subconsciously at least they think of Catholics as second class citizens and of themselves as an elite which will remain in control.

For a long time most Catholics in Scotland were second class citizens. That is one historical reason for the defence of a special school system cherished by a community too many of whose members have been faced with the choice of Protestantism or hunger, in the nineteenth century and even more recently. For integration to become a reality there must be a deeper self-criticism on the part of many Scottish Protestants. Unless Catholics are convinced that they will not be discriminated against in an integrated system they cannot be expected to abandon the existing system. Can we be sure that there will be no discrimination on religious grounds? I have a letter written by a recent director of education informing an applicant for a headship in the Strathclyde region that he could not be considered for the post as it was in "a Protestant school". This was perhaps hardly surprising in view of the furore created about the same time by the appointment to a school in Lanarkshire of a janitor who was a Catholic. As in Northern Ireland, there are jobs at stake and not only among the working class.

I can see the possibility of integration nevertheless, given certain conditions. Again I am thinking of secondary education rather than primary. At secondary level children should be preparing for entry into full citizenship and its responsibilities. Religion still matters in our world and it is important that respect for conscience and an ability to live in mutual respect and toleration should be acquired by everyone as far as possible. This ideal would seem more attainable if we learned to face differences and to live with them, rather than attempting to ignore or evade them as long as possible.

Consequently, I would like to see, in integrated schools, a variety of religion courses which would reflect the actual situation in Scotland and the varied wishes of parents. There would then be a choice open in religion as in science or languages. In Scotland at present this would mean at least three courses in most schools, one representing the Presbyterian tradition, one Catholic and the third Humanist, each taught by the groups they represented. Such a system would stimulate discussion among staff and pupils and encourage the latter to develop adult, personal positions in religion and morals.

Some years ago I drafted proposals for training teachers who would become eligible for posts in the departments of religious studies which I envisaged as part of an integrated system. It was received with every appearance of enthusiasm by those who might have been responsible for its

implementation, until Cardinal Gray much to their surprise and dismay accepted the idea. At that point the enthusiasm of my Presbyterian friends suddenly evaporated and only Episcopalians and Humanists showed any further interest.

They illustrated what seems to me an important element in any discussion of integration, the fact that some who give lip-service to the idea rely on the Roman Catholic authorities to block it. They would be seriously disturbed if it came about since it would be a major step towards the disestablishment of religion with consequent loss of privileged positions.

In Scotland today there are two religious establishments set up by Act of Parliament: the Kirk, by an Act of 1929 and the Catholic school system by an Act of 1918. If one system were disestablished it would weaken the position of the others. At present each secures job advantages to numbers of people, often to mediocrity. The Kirk has a privileged position in broadcasting, hospital and prison chaplaincies, to take only the more obvious examples. The Catholic school system similarly ensures an employment structure in which competition is reduced.

There are signs of change, made largely through necessity none the less valuable. I have met in a large Catholic school a head of the history department who is an active member of the Salvation Army. In Heriot-Watt University there is an effective team ministry of chaplains. Such instances show what is possible in spite of the strong sectarianism which still exists in some places.

But if we want a more free, pluralist society, with one generally accepted educational system there are awkward facts to be faced more squarely yet and we must tackle the disguised sectarianism which sometimes lurks behind ecumenical gestures. I believe that both the major churches in Scotland should be disestablished; that the fundamental issues of life, the values which shape our society should be discussed in senior schools freely by staff and students alike. Those who profess to believe in freedom of conscience will accept the results "whether they lead to Rome or to Salt Lake City". Those who have faith in the working of the Holy Spirit will not fear the result of living in a more open and therefore more challenging situation than there is at present.